

Pune shows the way with unique tribute

War memorial dedicated to the nation

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In a fitting tribute to fifty one years of Indian independence, a unique war memorial at the Morwada junction in Pune was on Saturday dedicated to the nation by State Governor P.C.Alexander.

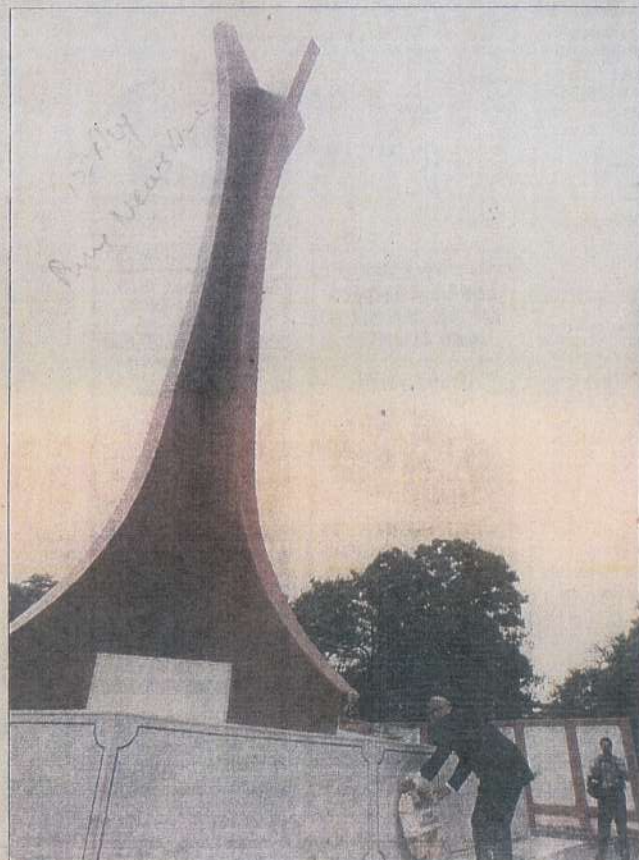
Solemnity denoted the occasion and emotions ran high as buglers sounded the Last Post, guards presented arms and the Governor led the gathering by placing a wreath at the martyrs' memorial base, the first of its kind in South Asia to be erected through citizens' contribution initiated by the Express Citizens' War Memorial Committee with the active support of The Indian Express.

Located in the Pune Cantonment, this impressive war memorial — the first post-independence monument with the names of the martyrs inscribed, it is unlike memorials dedicated to the unknown soldier — rises 50 feet high with four leaf-shaped wings.

The main pillar, dressed in cherry-brown granite, is surrounded by marble panels, each eight feet tall, carrying the names of martyrs. There are no inscriptions, no plaques on the central pillar.

A total of 1080 names of officers and men hailing from Maharashtra who died in action since August 15, 1947 have been inscribed on marble. The names have been listed year-wise and alphabetically, and not according to rank.

Paying homage to the men who made the supreme sacrifice defending the nation, the Governor observed that the monument was the first of its kind dedicated to heroes of the post-independence era. Appreciating the magnificent monument, the Governor expressed the hope



A NATION REMEMBERS: Governor P.C.Alexander placing a wreath at the country's first ever post-independence war memorial (left) with the names of the martyrs at the Morwada junction in Pune on Saturday. Parents of Col.Prasanna Gole (right), who was killed in anti-militancy operations in Kashmir Valley on July 18, are unable to hold back their tears as the Governor meets them after the ceremony. *Newsline photos by Milind Wadekar*

that the memorial, erected through the initiative of citizens, would set the trend for erecting similar monuments in other parts of the country.

Hailing the services rendered by the armed forces, Alexander said that at a time when all major democratic institutions were inviting criticism, the armed

forces had retained their clean character and apolitical nature.

"The pillars of democracy such as free and fair elections, free press, independent judiciary and civil services have at one time or the other faced censure from society for their failure to live up to standards." "People may criticise the so-called



fair path of the electoral process, they may not be in agreement with the press or they may even question the manner of functioning of the judiciary or the civil services for fallen standards of rectitude. Yet it is a matter of great pride that the armed forces continue to be held in high esteem for their efficiency, integrity, dedication,

patriotism and discipline," Alexander said.

Earlier, Lt Gen B T Pandit (ret'd), member of the Express Citizens' War Memorial Committee, in his welcoming address, mentioned that every nation had two sets of freedom fighters — one set gets freedom for the nation and the other

set keeps fighting to preserve the freedom.

Lt Gen Pandit said the initiative to erect the memorial was taken by citizens when, during the silver jubilee celebrations in Pune of the 1971 war, the absence of a post-independence war memorial was acutely felt. It was decided that citizens would take the initiative in the project and, more importantly, the memorial would not be dedicated to the unknown soldier.

He said the names of 1080 martyrs from all three services had been inscribed in marble at the memorial and efforts would be made to update the list every year.

The wreath-laying ceremony, watched among others by the next of kin of the men killed in action, was accompanied by the chanting of hymns by religious teachers.

The sounding of the Last Post was followed by a two-minute silence in memory of the heroes and the Rouse Reveille which heralds the arrival of a new dawn.

Among those who placed wreaths at the memorial base were Lt Gen H.M.Khanna, General Officer Commanding in Chief (GOC-in-C), Southern Command, Vice Admiral Arun Prakash, Commandant of the National Defence Academy (NDA), Air Vice Marshal B K Pandey, Deputy Commandant of NDA. The three senior officers representing the Army, Navy and Air Force, they were received by Pune Sub-Area Commander, Brfg Madan Gopal.

In a moving gesture, Admiral J G Nadkarni, former chief of Naval Staff, placed a wreath on behalf of all ex-Service-men.

Prem Malhotra, mother of Second Lieutenant Rishi Malhotra who was killed in anti-militancy operations during May, 1994 in Doda in Jammu and Kashmir, could not hold back her tears as she was led up to the memorial to offer tributes on behalf of the next of kin of war casualties. Prakash Kardale, coordinator of the Express Citizens' War Memorial Committee, also placed a wreath at the memorial base.